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ABSTRACT

Skills in comprehending the spoken language source are becoming increasingly important due to the audio-visual orientation of our culture. It would seem natural, therefore, to adjust the learning goals and environment accordingly. The video-cassette machine is an ideal means for creating this learning environment and developing the listening skill. The learning setting, the accompanying pictorial series and the fact that the spoken text is the only source for homework information provide the incentive to develop listening skills. This sort of application of the video-cassette presumes an adequate viewing facility, modest in-house production facilities, as well as slides and films. Any methodology using the video-cassette would capitalize on its single most important feature, the opportunity to review the spoken material and to build one's confidence for comprehending the unremitting voice of the speaker. Therefore, the teacher would provide removable "crutches" to make learning as efficient as possible. A sample lesson based on a description of the interior of a church in Germany is provided. The lesson includes the text, sample vocabulary exercises, instructions for using the drills, synthetic exercises demanding content, active vocabulary and syntactical mastery, and comments on the role of the instructor and good use of class time. (AMH)

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AUDIO-VISUAL TECHNOLOGY AND THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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To date, audio-visual materials have played a role in our classes primarily as sources for cultural background; they have tended to be used but rarely to promote direct, measurable language advancement. The reasons for this have not only been the high cost of producing film and slide-based programs coordinated with the classroom goals of systematic language acquisition, but also the limited practical accessibility of these materials for student study and review.[1] For even if financial and technical means are there to acquire the available film programs, it is usually difficult or impossible to arrange for settings where the students can review the materials on their own time as much as they may want to. Individual study and practice based on audio-visual materials arealmost always ruled out simply for logistical reasons. The most one can generally hope for is a group viewing of the materials, with possibly one repetition. And during this time, that other, primary resource of classroom work, the instructor, is dormant, and all conversational interchange, the essential core of the modern language class, ceases. This, I believe, has been the primary reason for only limited utilization of audio-visual programs devoted to language acquisition, and the relegation of audio-visual materials in general to a secondary, culturally supportive role in the language learning setting.

The incentives have been great, meanwhile, to create

a language program that is audio-visually based, with the same qualities of accessibility, easy review, and systematic achievement of syntactical and vocabulary building goals as we have in our current text-based programs. Never has our world culture been so audio-visually oriented, for one thing. Television has been moving towards primacy over the written word for some years now, and the prognosis is for this development to continue at an even greater degree.[2] And the almost unavoidable presence of television with its audio source of language coincides with the prominence since the Second World War of audio-lingual language skills, as travel and international exchange have increased dramatically. While in no way suggesting that the written word should be abandoned as the learning source for our language classes, I believe that skills in comprehending the spoken language source, whether in person or electronic, are becoming increasingly important, and it would seem natural to adjust the learning goals and the learning environment accordingly.

The videocassette machine--and in a few years, the video disc--are ideal means for creating this new language learning environment. The videocassette is, and the video disc will be even more so, a handy medium for audio-visual programs as attractive and appealing in their own way as our best reading texts. For students to understand these programs, however, the listening, rather than the reading skill, is primary. And from the student's point of view, the videocassette is an audio

model very nearly as reviewable as the written text of our readers--and as malleable to various methodologies of language acquisition (cf. pp. 5ff., below).

Several advantages obtain from application of the videocassette to high school and college language programs. Most importantly, the learning setting itself directly conveys to the student the necessity of the listening skill that other methodologies do not achieve when they tape a written text or written exercises. If the spoken text is the only source for the information the student needs to prepare his homework, the incentive to develop the skills for understanding the spoken material is that much greater. The regular tape recorder, of course, confronts the student with this same requirement. But the incentive to understand and the guidance for understanding that are potentially afforded the student by an interesting, accompanying pictorial series was never present with the simple audio tape.

The familiar, textual base to our humanists' craft has, moreover, been gradually and naturally expanding to include audio-visual products of television technology. To begin to use these as source materials in the systematic instruction of language is to anticipate a permanent broadening of the cultural resources we will be addressing interpretively as academic humanists more and more often in the future.

Finally, the primacy of listening comprehension in a videocassette-based teaching program can be expected to remove

some of the barriers now encountered for significant development of audio-lingual skills at the advanced learning level. Not only is the audio model introduced in a manner having more natural necessity to it, but the most immediate way for the student to mimic and practice the model is to speak it himself. The student's speaking skill, not the reading or writing skill, would be the first to profit from increased listening comprehension.

Hardware and source material. Before turning to the specific methodology proposed, some comments on the basics. This sort of application of the videocassette to language learning probably presumes an audio-visual viewing facility of at least five machines, accessible much like a reserved book room. Class size, hours the facility is open, and the length of individual assignments will obviously determine the particular equipment requirements. Unless large numbers of commercial tapes are available--they currently are not--one must also have at least modest in-house production facilities. Numerous colleges and public school systems already have much of this production equipment on hand.

In the programs we developed, which were based on a series of 35mm slides, the greatest cost was for the purchase of videocassettes (about $20 each). In order to assure availability, we had each cassette reproduced at the rate of one for every eight students. Since the cassettes are reusable

for this purpose almost indefinitely, the initial acquisition cost can be spread out over the long term.

Both slides and film can serve as original material. Film is naturally somewhat more interesting to students. Slides are more controllable in class recitations, if one chooses, as we have, to show them once more on the classroom screen without the spoken text for student descriptions of the picture. This will simultaneously review the assigned material and encourage practice of the student's active vocabulary. Film reduced to a slide series which still portrays significant stations in the film's story line is a way to adapt filmed sources to this kind of classroom review.

A suggested application. The opportunity to review the spoken material and to build one's confidence for comprehending the unremitting voice of the speaker is the single most important feature afforded by the videocassette for language learning, and any pedagogy seeking to employ this new technological tool must be designed around this feature. That is, one must anticipate the student's gradual aural mastery of the spoken text which will come with repeated listenings. By providing removable "crutches" that will make his learning as efficient as possible and by directing his listening attention along the proper avenues, one can expect to achieve effective advancement of a student's listening comprehension. It is this sort of support and direction we propose below.

Text. As a sample spoken text I am using the following description of the interior of the St. Elisabeth's Church in Marburg, Germany. It would accompany a slide of the church's interior. It is important that the text would never be available in toto for the student to read.

> "Eine der ersten großen gotischen Kirchen in Deutschland ist die Elisabethkirche in Marburg an der Lahn. Wir blicken hier in das Gewölbe der Kirche und stellen gleich den Unterschied zwischen den romanischen und gotischen Gewölben fest: das Gotische steigt auf, während das Romanische in sich ruht."

Vocabulary. The vocabulary that might be provided the student as a written handout prior to viewing the cassette is as follows:

gotisch - Gothic (a medieval architectural style)
an der Lahn - on the Lahn river
das Gewölbe - vault, structural arch
der Unterschied - difference
fest.stellen (w) - determine
auf.steigen; stieg. . . auf; ist . . . aufgestiegen - - to rise up

Introductory exercises. The initial drill that an intermediate student should be able to perform easily early in the second year of German is as follows:

Complete the following sentences using the correct form of the sentence:

1. Eine sehr frühe Kirche in Deutschland [sein] _____ die Elisabethkirche in Marburg an der Lahn.
2. Man [blicken] _____ hier in das Gewölbe der Kirche und [fest.stellen] _____ gleich den Unterschied zwischen den romanischen und gotischen Gewölben.
3. Das Gotische [auf.steigen] _____, während das Romanische in sich [ruhen] _____ .

The above drills obviously consist merely of providing the correct form of the verb. For this drill, as for those more complicated exercises that follow, the spoken text of the video cassette provides a model which the student can refer back to, but which is useful only if he can aurally recognize the proper form. Hence, from the very outset, the student is called upon to exercise an aural recognition skill to the same degree a written text would demand reading recognition ability.

In developing more complicated drills, the goal was to spread out the capabilities the student should ultimately be able to perform in class simultaneously, namely:

(1) What is it that I want to say in answer to the question?

(2) What words do I need to express this in German?

(3) What grammatical and syntactical adjustments do I

have to make?

The following synthetic exercises demand at the final stage content mastery, active vocabulary and syntactical mastery.

Synthetic exercises (German).

1. ein- / (gen.) / erst- / groß- / gotisch- / Kirchen /Deutschland / Elisabethkirche / Marburg
2. man / blicken / Gewölbe / Kirche // feststellen / Unterschied / romanisch / gotisch / Gewölbe
3. das Gotische / aufsteigen // das Romanische / in sich ruhen

Synthetic exercises (English).

1. first / Gothic / churches / Germany
2. archway // difference
3. Gothic // Romanesque

Note that the final stage of English cues is so abbreviated as to be devoid of specific content. The student must be able to demonstrate not only mastery of vocabulary and syntax, but also knowledge of the textual content. The advantage to using some English cues, however, is that the student is specifically required to master words appropriate to the description and add presumably new items to his active vocabulary in the target language.

The most important general feature of this approach is the efficient allocation of resources. It locates the audio-visual study, with the cassette alone, outside the classroom and places the audio-lingual practice, based on this study, in this classroom with the instructor.

Through this brief overview of what is available and the description of one possible application, I hope to have shed some light on the great potential videocassettes represent for foreign language teaching. They promise not only greater interest and involvement on the part of our students during the language learning process, but afford the ready means to develop effective methodologies for systematic improvement of audio-lingual skills up through advanced language learning levels.

If such a prospect seems attractive, further initiatives will be necessary to bring it to fruition in our foreign language programs. While slides that describe the countries of our target languages are generally available, a unifying sequence must be established, and the spoken text and accompanying drills must be produced. One may also wish for slides that are of better quality and more revealing of a particular theme than one's own collection--the most available source--can provide.

There are, in addition, innumerable films and television programs suitable for adaption to videocassettes. But beyond the already time-consuming work of establishing the script and developing the exercises, overcoming copyright constraints is almost always complicated and expensive, and is probably only to be done in some commercial context. But if the idea itself is sound, these problems are not insurmountable constraints, and commercial producers will be found.

NOTES

1. For the German classroom, the film series Guten Tag and Guten Tag, Wie Geht's immediately come to mind. They are of very high quality, but are also correspondingly expensive ($1890 and $3900, respectively).

2. The New York Times, Feb. 26, 1978, reported that the satellite technology already exists for direct television broadcasts across national frontiers with no intervening cables or switching. If the political difficulties cited in the article can be overcome, seeing foreign television on our own sets may occur sooner than we think.